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DRAMATIC WRITING.

AMONG the peculiarities of the ancient literature of Wales there is nothing more remarkable than its deficiency in that species of writing, which is adapted to scenic representation. If we except the *Mabinogion*, there are no remains of past times, within our knowledge, that have any pretension to a dramatic character; and it is only, from their colloquial form, that the *Mabinogion* are all to be considered in this point of view. The other requisites of a dramatic composition are entirely wanting; and it is, moreover, certain, that they never could have been designed for theatrical representation. It has, indeed, been somewhat rashly asserted, that this species of amusement was formerly well known among that class of nations, of which the Welsh form a part: and the vulgar buffoonery, until lately common in Wales, under the name of *Anterlute*, has been adduced as a proof of this assumed fact*. The very name, however, of this histrionic exhibition (such as it was) seems, notwithstanding the ingenious and erudite etymology just quoted from the *Cambrian Register*, to indicate a comparatively modern origin, since it is obviously a mere corruption of the English word *Interlude*†. And whoever has

* We allude in this place, more particularly, to a note in the third volume of the *Cambrian Register*, p. 99, which we here insert for the edification, as well as amusement, of our readers.—“The dramatic entertainments, formerly so prevalent among the Celtic tribes, and still in vogue in some parts of Wales, from the paucity of their characters, and the moral tendency of their subject, may probably be traced to the same source. [*The Damhegion and Mabinogion*]. They are generally acted, in the open air, on temporary stages erected in woods and forests, and are denominated *Chwareu 'r Hen-dre-lwyd*, Dramatic Sports of the old Town. They are asserted by some antiquaries to be of Trojan origin. Many of the inferior Welsh bards delight in this species of scenic composition, which they corruptly call *Enterlude*.”—Who the writer, or rather dreamer, of this sage note was we know not; but we cannot help observing, that Swift's derivation of *Alexander the Great*, from “All Eggs under the Grate,” is quite as much to the purpose as the foregoing etymology of *Enterlude*. It is owing to such wild and unmeaning conjectures as this, that the real character of our ancient literature has been so much misunderstood, and so unjustly despised.

† There are, we believe, some printed collections of these Welsh Interludes, but none, of which we are aware, anterior to the last century. And it deserves also to be noticed, with reference to this point, that none of our

witnessed one of these stage-performances must have seen how little allied it was to any thing of a *scenic* character, if we except the plaustral strains of Thespis and his uncouth associates,

Quæ canerent agerentque peruncti fœcibus ora.

Yet, this very resemblance between the Welsh *Anterlute* and the first dawnings of the dramatic art in Greece may be assumed by some as a proof of the antiquity of the former, as if it were probable, that, through the various changes of manners and customs, during the lapse of so many centuries, it should still have retained its primitive character. The thing is incredible, and is not only at variance with the experience of other nations, but receives no countenance from any thing that is recorded in the literary history of our own.

The cause of this singularity in the manners and literature of the ancient Cymry is, perhaps, to be found, at first, in the operation of the Bardic or Druidical Institution, which appears to have been, in many respects, inimical to the encouragement of those lighter arts, which have for their object the relaxation, or the enjoyment, of time. The severity of its laws, and the grave import of most of its doctrines, may, like the sectarian spirit of after times, have had a kind of prohibitory influence on the ordinary recreations of life. And, when the mystical system of Bardism ceased to operate in its primitive vigour, the state of warfare, in which the Cymry were plunged for so many ages, must have had, though through means totally different, a tendency to the same ultimate result. To this union of causes must, in all probability, be ascribed that deficiency in the early literature of Wales, to which we have alluded, as well as the sober and staid character, which it generally assumes, supplying so rarely, as it does, any of those sportive sallies of the imagination, which, among a people, addicted to any species of public diversions, could not but have been prevalent.

We now turn from these prefatory remarks, naturally suggested by the occasion, to the particular design of this article, which is to redeem a pledge, we have long made, by intro-

early bards, even so low down as Davydd ab Gwilym, have any allusion to dramatic representations among the Welsh, a circumstance which can only be explained by their non-existence.

ducing to our readers a few specimens of a Cornish Play or Opera, which, after what we have just said, will be regarded, perhaps, as a sort of phenomenon in Celtic literature. Similar compositions, however, seem to have been common at one time in the Cornish language, as was also a rude mode of scenic representation*; but it does not appear, that the practice is to be traced to any remote age. On the contrary, it owed its origin, most probably, to the intercourse, that existed between the people of Cornwall and their English neighbours, and is, therefore, not to be considered as characteristic of their ancient and national manners. The original of the following production is deposited, we believe, in the Bodleian Library, at Oxford: and a copy of it, in the hand-writing of our celebrated archæologist, Mr. Edward Llwyd, is preserved among the Harleian Collection in the British Museum. It is from the last-mentioned MS. that the following extracts are taken; and, if the taste of our readers at all corresponds with our own, we are sure they will not be displeased with the parsimony we have exercised on the occasion. For it will be seen, that, however curious this Opera may be in some points of view, it cannot be regarded as a fair sample of Cornish literature; since, instead of exhibiting the language in its mature and native vigour, it obviously betrays, by its diction, the feeble decrepitude of its declining age. In justification of this remark, we shall insert, among our extracts, the commencement of the original, which will prove, by its corruptions, that, at the time of its composition (two centuries ago), the Cornish tongue had lost most of its genuine characteristics.

Of the plot of this drama it is hardly necessary to speak,

* Carew, in his Survey of Cornwall, has, on this subject, the following passage:—"The Guary Miracle, in English, Miracle-Play, is a kind of interlude, compiled in Cornish out of some Scripture history. For representing this they raised an earthen amphitheatre in some open field, having the diameter of this enclosed plain some 40 or 50 feet. The country people flock from all sides to see and hear it; for they have therein devils and devices to delight as well the eye as the ear. The players conne not their parts without book, but are prompted by one called the Ordinary, who followeth at their heels with the book in his hand." See CAMBRO-BRITON, vol. ii. p. 16, where the reader will find a letter on the subject from Dr. Percy, whose researches in antiquarian literature are so well known and so justly appreciated.

rejecting, as it does, not only the established unities of the stage, but the ordinary probabilities of history :—

————— *velut ægri somnia, vanæ*

Fingentur species, ut nec pes, nec caput uni

Reddatur formæ.

It seems, indeed, to have been written in imitation of those extravagancies, called scriptural or mystical dramas, which, about the same age, made their appearance in English literature, mixing with their many anomalies an indecent, if not a profane, perversion of the sacred narrative on which they were founded*.

The MS. in the British Museum, has the following title :—
“ The Creation of the World, being a Cornish Play or Opera, written by Mr. Wm. Jordan, and, for the better understanding of that language, translated *verbatim* by Mr. John Keigwyn of Monshole, of the Lower House, at the request of the Rev. Father in God, Jonathan, Lord Bishop of Exon, 1691†.”—And it thus concludes :—“ Here endeth the Creation of the World with the Flood, written by William Jordan, Aug. 12, 1611.”—To the whole is subjoined a note, intended probably for Welsh, by Mr. Edward Llwyd, of which the following is a literal transcript :—“ *Mi a gydbrovays hwn â'r kynscriv, yn Akadhev Rhydychen, yr igeinved o vis Hwevrôr A° 170½.*—E. Lhd.”

Our extracts commence with the first eight and twenty lines of the Cornish.

CORNISH OPERA.

AN GREANS AN BYS.

An Kensa Core Gwawy.

DEW AN TAS.

Ego sum Alpha et Omega

Heb dalatho na dowethva :

Pur wyre me yw.

* We cannot be suspected, we hope, of including within the objects of this animadversion such a performance as the *Samson Agonistes* of Milton. Our remarks have reference to such wild and anomalous creations of the brain, as the Miracle-plays alluded to in the preceding note. These monstrous productions, as far as we recollect, had risen into particular estimation during the puritanical days of Cromwell.

† According to a note, accompanying this play, it appears that the translation was finished in the year 1693.

Me a vyn may fo gorrys,
Ha pub onyn thý thceree
A vith gorrys thom servya,
Pan vidnav ve commandya.

The preceding passage is thus rendered by Mr. Keigwyn.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

The First Act of the Play.

GOD THE FATHER.

**I am Alpha and Omega,
Without beginning or ending :
Very true I am.**

**In this place shall be my praises
On the face of the water certainly :**

* See Gen. ch. 10.

Three persons and one Deity
Do rule of the world sovereign,
In much honour and virtue.

I my Son and Holy Ghost,
Three persons and one substance,
Comprehended in one God.

I am called God the Father,
All light above every thing :
Soon shall be made by my grace
Heaven a royal place for my dwelling,
And my will is that it be my throne of residence.

And the earth likewise below
Soon by compass shall be made:
This shall be my footstool,
For my pleasure at all times,
And mine honour as well.

Heaven here is by me made,
By my Godhead certainly ;
And within it shall be put
Who worship me with joy and song.
I will, they shall be for ever.

Nine orders of glorious angels
They shall be royal and bright,
Halleluias to me shall send
To serve me, sovereign of the world:
Now each order to its seat.

I do will that they be put,
And to every one his charge
Shall be appointed to serve me,
When I shall command.

The next extract describes the commencement of the interview between Eve and the Tempter, but can hardly remind us of the corresponding passage, wherein "the spirited sly snake" is first introduced by the sublime muse of Milton.

SERPENT.

(In the Tree.)

Eva, why wont you draw nigh
To discourse and talk with me,
I know what if you knew,
Very joyful I would make you :
Hearken to me if you will.

The ensuing lines, which narrate the death of our first parent, are remarkable for that mixture of ludicrous mummery with the most serious scenes, which prevails in other parts of this heterogeneous performance. The devils, introduced on the occasion, were, no doubt, important personages, when embodied, on the stage, in all the dignifying attributes of flesh and blood.

DEATH.—Adam, be ready for me,
Thou see'st me come,
To take from hence—

Thy life with my spear.

To take from hence
There is no longer stay ;
Wherefore let me pierce thee,
That I may hote thee—through the heart that I may.
[*Death smiteth him with a spear, and he falleth upon a bed.*]

ADAM.—Death, I give thee much thanks,
To take my life——

Out of this world.

I am weary of it, I thank God for it,
My life will be glorious to me to be fetch'd hence ;
Vexation and sorrow of the world :—
They all followed me here.
Therefore let me commend my soul to the Trinity.

FIRST DEVIL.—Comrades be ready,
All you devils,
Adam is dead,
Come fetch him to the kitchen :

To the pit below.

LUCIFER.—No, no, you shall not do so ;
'Tis otherwise ordained for him :
In Limbo on the other side,
There he shall stay.—

So 'tis ordained by the Father.

Thou knowest, that in the large hell
There be real mansions,
Where the devils are,
That came out of the bright heavens :
Bearing rule together with me.

The dwelling of the churl Adam
Shall be on the higher side,

When you built an ark,
Just here in the midst of the land,
There was no sea nigh,
To put it in motion.

JAPHETH.—They made a scoff of it,
The fear of God's anger was not

On them, I am sure.

NOAH.—The Flood is come—
'Tis good for me to dispatch :
Every sort of beast is gone
Into the ark to their kind,

As is commanded to me.

My children go together,
And their wives also ;
The earth is almost covered
By the rain above,—

Thou, woman, come in, wilt thou be drowned ?

NOAH'S WIFE.—'Tis fit to save what is,
I must not cast it away.
They cost store of money,
The things, that are here,

Dear Noah, you know that.

NOAH.—'Tis a long time, truly,
Since we lost sight of land ;

Wherefore go forth the raven.

Fly speedily and see,
If thou canst find land ;
And the dove, very surely,
I will send very quickly,

If she can have sight of the earth.

FATHER IN HEAVEN.—Every thing is dead,
In which the spirit of life was :
I will command anon
The rain that it rain no more.

We here bid adieu to Mr. Jordan and his "Opera," nothing doubting that our readers are fully satisfied with the taste they have had of it. As one of the few relics of Cornish literature (if we may so speak of it), it is, perhaps, curious, and, now that the language has become wholly extinct, must, with all its imperfections, possess an interest, to which it could not otherwise be entitled, and, least of all, as a literary production. It is, at once, a singular specimen of the corruption of the language, and of the depraved taste of the times, in which it was written.